

UNCLAS QUITO 002193

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BACKGROUND ON NEW ECUADORIAN FOREIGN MINISTER

¶1. Summary: (SBU) Francisco Carrion Mena, who has been tapped to replace Foreign Minister Antonio Parra, comes to the job with a history of leftist leanings, but with a solid background as a career diplomat and a good relationship with the United States. Carrion, the current ambassador to Spain, and Parra will switch jobs in October. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Press accounts and Embassy sources say the veteran diplomat shares some ideology with his grandfather Benjamin Carrion (1897-1979), a prominent left-wing intellectual. The elder Carrion penned numerous books, promoted cultural enrichment in Ecuador and is considered one of the country's most influential leaders. An Embassy source claims the younger Carrion took part in leftist political movements in his youth.

¶3. (U) Carrion is highly esteemed by his future peers in the cabinet. Media describe him as a demanding perfectionist who should not be seen as a pawn to U.S. interests. President Palacio was quoted as saying that the change in leadership would not alter the country's foreign policy course. Carrion will maintain Ecuador's defense of its sovereignty and national interests, Palacio stated publicly, "but in a less confrontational and belligerent way."

¶4. (U) Carrion's 31-year diplomatic career includes postings in London (1991 to 1996) and Paris (1982 to 1988). He achieved career ambassador rank in 1996 and served as Vice Minister of the Foreign Ministry from 1998 to 2000. From 1996 to 1998 he worked on peace negotiations with Peru while also serving as Subsecretary for National Sovereignty.

¶5. (U) Born in Quito April 8, 1953, Carrion studied law and diplomatic affairs, receiving a undergraduate degree from Central University in Quito in 1974 and his doctorate from the same university in 1978. He taught international relations courses at Central University and the Diplomatic Academy from 1988 to 1992. Carrion came to the United States under the International Visitor program in 1989. He speaks English, French and Spanish. He is married to Paulina Arcos, an art historian. They have two sons. Carrion's brother, Andres, is a prominent TV news anchor in Quito.

¶6. (U) Carrion's five-year term in Madrid coincided with a period of massive Ecuadorian economic migration to that country. Between 1999 and 2003 the Ecuadorian population in Spain grew from 50,000 to 400,000. As a consequence, Carrion focused on maintaining orderly migration and protecting migrants' rights. He addressed the issue through contact with Spanish and Ecuadorian NGOs and by participation on the United Nations Committee on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

¶7. Comment: (SBU) Since his IV visit, Carrion has reportedly had an open and cordial relationship with U.S. counterparts. Newly appointed cabinet ministers and solid USG contacts Oswaldo Jarrin of Defense and Oswaldo Molestina of Government hold Carrion in high regard for his talent and professionalism. We are guardedly optimistic about the change in leadership at the Foreign Ministry. Admittedly, Carrion benefits from any comparison to his predecessor who consistently set back mission goals by courting Venezuela and provoking Colombia.

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